

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 270 988

FL 015 752

AUTHOR Lujan, Mary Estelle; And Others
TITLE A Parent Training Early Intervention Program in
Preschool Literacy.
PUB DATE 14 Feb 86
NOTE 26p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Literacy Education; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Child
Relationship; *Parent Education; *Parent Influence;
*Parent Participation; *Preschool Education; Program
Effectiveness; Role Models; Socioeconomic Status

ABSTRACT

A project investigating the effects on parent attitudes and child performance of a planned parent intervention program stressing specific parent training in literacy concepts and practices was undertaken with lower socioeconomic group families with children aged three to five. The parents attended four workshops emphasizing aspects of literacy such as the reading process, environmental print, literacy games, and writing, using presentations, role-playing, speakers, question-and-answer sessions, and discussion groups as teaching techniques. Children were administered pre- and post-tests of literacy development, and followup home visits were made to study any changes in home environment. The data were gathered into intensive case studies of each child. It was found that: (1) parents developed self-confidence and pleasure in working with their children; (2) the workshop format was the most effective and personally satisfying approach for parents; (3) specific, informal, and instructive parent training was needed and desired; (4) the lower socioeconomic parents' educational aspirations for their children were as high as other parents' aspirations; (5) lowering situational, linguistic, and cultural barriers was very helpful in promoting parent participation; and (6) providing parent training improved parent-child relationships. (MSE)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED270988

A PARENT TRAINING EARLY INTERVENTION
PROGRAM IN PRESCHOOL LITERACY

by

Mary Estelle Luján, Ed.D.
Fort Lewis College
Durango, Colorado

Doriann L. Stolworthy, Ed.D.
New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, New Mexico

and

Sharon Lee Wooden, Ed.D.
New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, New Mexico

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Mary Estelle Luján

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

February 14, 1986

FL015752

Abstract

The research was undertaken to examine the effects of a planned parent intervention program that stressed specific parent training in literacy concepts and practices. A major assumption was that significant differences exist between children of parents who have received literacy training and those who have not. The quantitative findings resulting from this investigation supported the qualitative result; that is, parent training in literacy concepts does have an effect on children's performance on literacy tasks.

Early Parent Intervention in Preschool Children's Development of Literacy

Parent support, especially reading aloud to children, is a critical factor in the development of preschool literacy (Clark, 1976; Durkin, 1966; Holdaway, 1979). Many children come to school already armed with the literacy skills needed to be successful, but some, unfortunately, are slower and need more assistance in developing a literacy set. Differences in socioeconomic status, in oral language background and in home environment (Teale, 1978) are common factors in disparate literacy development.

A summary of the literature showed that parents are important to the child in the four following ways: (a) formation of attitudes and expectations about reading, (b) serving as reading models, (c) participating in the child's literacy activities, and (d) consciously teaching. Generally speaking, most parents are not consciously aware of this role as literary models and reading teachers within the family environment (Luján and Wooden, 1985). They provide the print-laden environment, motivate and encourage the child, plan and discuss home literary events, participate in the child's literacy games, and facilitate the child's socialization to literacy. Consciously or unconsciously, parents do behave in certain ways that either emphasize or negate the value of literacy.

The key to family background is the parents. It is they who first socialize and then support the child as s/he moves through the school system. We need to know much more about minority and

low SES socialization practices, experiences, and expectations, particularly as these apply to reading. Because early intervention programs have generally occurred under formal school auspices, e.g., Head Start, kindergarten, we are uncertain regarding the effects of informal parent training programs as a means of early intervention. Parental involvement is the earliest and most significant intervention technique that can be applied in the home setting.

This study focused on the question: What is the effect of informed parent training in literacy concepts on children's performance on environmental print awareness and book handling knowledge tests?

The research was undertaken to examine the effects of a planned parent intervention program that stressed specific parental training in literacy concepts and practices. A major assumption was that significant differences exist between children of parents who have received literacy training and those who have not. The intervention program was directed toward a low SES population because it is these families whose children are less likely to obtain the experiential background which underlies the development of literacy.

There were several objectives for the research. These included (a) noting changes in parental attitudes and behaviors, (b) recording specific child behaviors during the pretest, (c) classifying these child behaviors as primarily cognitive or psychomotor in orientation,

(d) describing the occurrence and type of behavior across pre- and post-testing, (e) comparing the pre- and post-test scores of each child on each subtest within each instrument, and (f) evaluating both statistical and qualitative significance of each child's performance to determine the effect of parent training in literacy concepts and practices.

Description of the Research

Four parent training workshops were prepared on specific topics which were organized around a crucial literacy concept. Each workshop emphasized a particular aspect of literacy such as the reading process, environmental print, literacy games, and writing. The workshop topics were organized around a core concept based on the work of current researchers in the field and included relevant materials for home implementation of those concepts. The cultural and linguistic composition of the population necessitated provision of all materials and handouts in the two representative languages, English and Spanish. A translator was also present to assist those parents whose primary or only language was Spanish. In this way, Spanish speakers were able to follow workshop presentations to understand participant questions, and to use the language most conducive to the full expression of their unique insights and experiences.

Presentations, role playing, speakers, question and answer sessions, and discussion groups were the methods of choice for the

training because they were considered more likely to elicit parental enthusiasm and increase the probability of subsequent home application.

Workshops were tape-recorded and the transcripts analyzed for pertinent parent comments, questions and behaviors indicative of concept assimilation, and home application.

A child care program was arranged so that parent time and energies could be freed to attend the workshops. All of the children of participating parents were admitted to the child care program whether or not they were of the age range (3-5) to be included in the study. No charge was made for child care because of the low SES of the designated population and because of the educational and research emphases of this investigation.

Both pre- and post-testing sessions were scheduled for the children in the 3-5 age group to determine whether or not parent training in literacy concepts would affect their children's development of literacy. Informal on-site observations supplemented the actual literacy testing protocols. The researcher's observations of child attitudes, behaviors, and performance were recorded as they occurred on the test notes.

Upon termination of the post-testing sessions, home visits with each child were arranged at the parents' convenience to facilitate the study of possible changes in the family environment. A

number of purposes were served by these visits. First, they were intended to be observations of the subjects in their natural home environment. Second, an estimate of the literacy support in the child's home environment was essential to reinforce and perhaps expand the background descriptions obtained from other sources. Third, the visits were a means to stimulate continued parental interest in their child's literacy development, to suggest subsequent activities, and to provide additional materials. Fourth, the visits were opportune occasions to collect the parent journals which would document environmental changes at home. Finally, personal interaction was generated by the home visit and provided a sense of closure for the parents.

All of the data obtained through the preceding measures were synthesized for intensive case studies of each child. The case study format was chosen because it provided specific examples of children's literacy behaviors that illustrated the more general data yielded by the descriptive statistics initially employed to structure the mass of data.

Print Awareness Test

The tests used in this study were the Print Awareness Test and the Book Handling Test (Goodman & Altwerger, 1981).

Slight changes on the print awareness instrument were made to accommodate the research situation. The original Condition 2

became Condition 1 in the present study, which showed print in a two-dimensional context. The remaining two conditions were photocopies of Condition 1 and a set of manuscript cards. Condition 1 was the actual stimulus itself; that is, the life-sized wrapper, box, advertisement, etc. Condition 1 presented print in a two-dimensional context of size and color. Condition 2 presented print in photocopied form with only the color removed. Condition 3 presented the print in abstract manuscript form on a 4" x 6" card. Print items on Conditions 1, 2 and 3 were randomized utilizing a table of random numbers (Kachigan, 1982, pp. 276-279).

Qualitative Findings

While performance progress on the Print Awareness Test was sufficient to establish overall statistical significance, logical reasons that explained the statistical differences among the three conditions were elaborated. The probability of the child's successful use of a print strategy was increased in Condition 1 by the presence of all cues needed by the child to make correct predictions and confirmations. These were the graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues discussed by Goodman (1976). The full context concept, however, also required the presence of other graphic areas such as color, size, shape, and situation. Condition 1 presented all of these to the child. In addition, this condition was the most representative of the child's immediate environment and the one with which s/he was more familiar.

Absence of color distinguished Condition 2 from Condition 1 and probably accounted for the occurrence of statistical insignificance on the t-tests. The color cue had more immediate impact on the child than other areas such as shape and size. The latter area required the child to make comparisons of size and shape in relation to another size and shape. For this age group the comparative skill was a relatively advanced procedure developmentally speaking, because it necessitated a greater degree of abstract conceptualization. Color, on the other hand, was perceptive in nature and operated within a conceptual framework of simple labeling. It was enough to recognize the child's use of color as an initial and basic print cue which, because of age factor and inexperience, frequently resulted in unsuccessful attempts to use color as a print strategy.

Overdependence on color as the child developed perception and discriminative skills meant that the ability to use other cues might not be as well-developed, as accessible, or as flexible. Consequently, the child's ability to invent new print strategies was restricted to the cues s/he did use until s/he progressed conceptually to complete utilization of all available cues. When that occurred the child's strategy-creating ability could be considered relatively stabilized.

The abstract nature of Condition 3 resembled school tasks. Cultural and language differences of low SES causes an inevitable home-school mismatch which minimizes parental cooperation in the teaching of those tasks. The less confidence parents felt, the less they realized that their efforts at home are critical to the child's acquisition of a confident and enthusiastic attitude towards literacy.

Some parents did attempt to teach their children letter identification, but the age factor commonly prevented successful achievement. The children's letter knowledge was simply inadequate for the task presented by Condition 3 and in the few instances where children attempted to identify letters, the task proved so laborious and frustrating for the children that no quantitative significance was observed. The design of Condition 3, totally decontextualized print, effectively deprived children of the opportunity to hypothesize about print, to confirm or reject their hypotheses, or to interact with print in any meaningful way. A few were quite skilled at letter calling yet the lack of meaningful cues prevented the emergence of Holdaway's (1979) success cycle of challenge, tension, prediction, confirmation and relaxation. Even in the case of competent letter callers, there was no real success which would have resulted in the intrinsic motivation necessary to sustain interest and involvement in the task.

This discussion supported previous research results which insisted on full context materials for concurrent development of literacy skills and effective strategies to process print including the meaning-centered drive and self-confident, success-oriented attitude that made the child an enthusiastic, intrinsically motivated reader.

Book Handling Test

As in the case of the Print Awareness Test, overall performance on the Book Handling Test was enough to establish statistical significance but variations did occur among the knowledge domains. Directionality and letter knowledge items showed that parent training had an effect on children's performance in these areas. Item analysis of the knowledge required showed these two areas to be more concrete in nature as indicated by the child's psychomotor responses. For example, all of the directional and terminology questions were straightforward requests to "show me..." and the information requested was easily demonstrated by pointing, tapping, framing, turning the book around, and so forth. These questions also were factual in nature and easily lent themselves to parent instruction. These behaviors not only were easily taught, demonstrated, and observed but additionally were age-appropriate for the developmental level of the pre-school child. Further, the influence of educational programs, such as Sesame Street, whose primary efforts are channeled towards the acquisition of these literacy skills, must not be discounted.

The terminology and retelling items, however, were a different matter. First of all, they did not enjoy the same educational, media, and parental support as directionality and letter knowledge did. The question format differed in that it introduced the "what..." type of interrogation which required the child to respond from a cognitively based level of abstract knowledge slightly removed from the concrete, age-appropriate psychomotor response elicited by the "Show me..." questioning pattern. Secondly, the areas under consideration presented more complexity for parents. They were difficult to demonstrate to parents and demanded more parental time and attention and participation than did the directionality and letter knowledge items. Retelling was mentioned in the reading workshops and examples of predictable language discussed, but apparently parents were not really comfortable with this kind of emphasis in family storytime. Parents perceived the directionality and letter knowledge tasks to be within their capacity to perform at home, while the statistically nonsignificant retelling and terminology subtests were differentially perceived and hence not accommodated in the home literacy activities.

Child Behaviors

Many child behaviors that are important in literacy development were emphasized in the case studies and showed the effect of parent training. These behaviors were indicators not only of individual

child efforts, but also of parent growth in literacy concepts and values since the parents were the ones who described the behavior in the first place. The most significant affective result was a positive change in most children's behavior. They began to attend to storytime and parent instruction more than had been done before and they showed increased self-direction in organizing personal time so that there would be time at night for a story. Self-control of behavior led to self-selection of learning experiences that were developmentally correct for them. Once self-control had begun, there were few behavior or attention span problems and the child could direct all energies toward any self-selected literacy task such as experimenting with letter formations and letter sequencing or connecting literacy processes with language(s).

All of the children in the study increased the quantity of response speech and the quality of informative and associative comments on the testing items. Parent involvement with the children gave them much more to think and ask questions about, to experiment with, and to recombine in novel ways. Language stimulation proved to be one of the more natural, spontaneous, and pervasive effects of parent training as demonstrated in the children's behavior patterns.

A final point of interest was that most of the children presumed every adult they met to be a willing and enthusiastic parti-

cipant in literacy activities. This attitude was a direct result of home fostering when the child came from an interactive child-centered home environment. Its importance could not be stressed enough because it was the adults in the child's world who introduced him/her to the initial aspects of the alphabetic and numerical systems employed by the social group to which the child belonged.

Parent Behaviors

Significant parent behaviors that emerged from the study were grouped in three categories: (a) those that promote literacy, (b) those that affect the child's literacy attitude, and (c) those that create a sound parent/child relationship. Parent behaviors from the first group are primarily those that involved parents in deliberate construction of a stimulating, interactive home environment directed toward literacy. Parents made special efforts to acquire new reading material for the child. The child's literacy efforts were valued and displayed throughout the house as well as in the child's own room. Many parents dated, annotated, and saved the drawings in a special folder or album, others encouraged the children to draw in their own spiral notebook, and still others included the child's scribbles in their adult diary or journal. These diaries served not only as models for the children, but also as powerful motivators to learn the mother tongue. Two families in the study

kept diaries in Turkish and Spanish to record the child's physical and cognitive progress. The parents became much more aware of literacy tools, books, paper, pencils and markers, and a number of them began making it a practice to take these implements along with them on short shopping trips and doctor's visits so that the child could learn to entertain him/herself constructively. It is only a short step from constructive entertainment to the child's incorporation of literacy activities in his/her playtime and leisure time pursuits. Reading children's tradebooks, listening to children retell stories, and family singing were still other important parent behaviors that contributed to the development of children's literacy.

The second group of parent behaviors affecting the child's literacy attitude included the following: (a) encouragement of creative play, literacy, and artistic activities; (b) adult enthusiasm and participation in the child's activities; (c) positive adult response and assistance; and (d) both implicit and explicit encouragement of second-language learning. Creative play, artistic activities, and second-language learning all appeared to be associated with the cognitive flexibility mentioned in the literature that fostered superior intellectual functioning. Second-language learning, especially, led the child to early literacy not only because it involved cognitive flexibility, but also because the child understood early on that language was a communicative system whose pro-

cesses were the same in whatever language was chosen for communication. Parents supported the communicative system of language whenever they provided multiple opportunities for the child to integrate all of the literacy activities in his/her family interactions. These literacy activities included conceptualizing, reading, writing, drawing, retelling stories, and singing. Each of the processes reinforced and added new insights to the other and a child who intuitively made this connection made the transition to literacy effortlessly as well.

The third group of parent behaviors that was highlighted in the study was directed toward the creation, maintenance, or improvement of the parent/child relationship. These behaviors included interest in the child's activities, enthusiastic and sincere responses to the child's beginning attempts, and letting the child know the parents' feelings exactly. One example cited in the study was a parent who said, "Now I think it's more fun than aggravating to work with her." A child cannot help but respond positively to the parents' enjoyment of a fun-filled time together. The best way for parents to show enjoyment of their child is by sharing adult activities with him/her as one mother did when she allowed the child to scribble in the mother's journal and when she read informative material to the child.

Workshop Effects

The effect most frequently mentioned by parents and which also had further implications was an increased awareness of the task faced by the child as s/he began learning the graphophonic aspect of the communicative system. Many parents had forgotten the immensity of the task and once they again became aware of it, they learned to appreciate and support their child's literacy efforts. Some developed quite an ability to analyze their child's drawings and scribbles from a developmental, non-critical perspective resulting in increased self-confidence as parents and as teachers of their child. Self-confidence encouraged the parents to ask questions of their child as s/he worked at literacy and, of course, the questioning meant that the parents really began to listen to what their child had to say. A success cycle involving improved communication, attitudinal changes, and increased self-confidence was set up that indicated reciprocal literacy growth between parent and child. One parent said she had "even started reading again." Another identified negative literacy messages that adults unconsciously communicate to children. The workshops sparked parental invention and creativity in planning an environment conducive to literacy pursuits and initiated a self-critiquing process that caused parents to raise educational aspirations for their child as well as for themselves.

Conclusions

The following conclusions might be drawn from the study on parent training in early literacy concepts.

1. It was possible to prepare parents to teach their children appropriate literacy concepts as well as discrete skills. Once parents achieved the necessary reading knowledge base, self-confidence in their teaching ability followed immediately and they were very willing to work with their child.
2. Parents could indeed teach their own child effectively and obtain more enjoyment from it than they had experienced before or had even thought would be possible.
3. The workshop format appeared to be the most effective and personally satisfying approach to parent training because it encouraged parent participation through questioning, discussions, and presentations. The small group approach facilitated the socialization process among the participants so that individual and group networking of ideas and experiences could take place. Parents were more ready to share these ideas and experiences with familiar participants than they might otherwise have been.
4. Normally, a university location, such as that used in the study, would be considered a very threatening setting

by low SES parents. The study showed that a threatening setting can be minimized by sensitive attention to the difficulties low SES parents might face (i.e., child care, language and cultural differences, educational level, transportation problems, lack of financial resources, etc.).

5. Parent feedback from the workshops revealed a very real need for specific, informal, and instructive parent recognition training in literacy concepts, processes, and materials. Not only the need but also parent receptivity to the workshop training was obvious.
6. It was possible to teach parents of varying educational levels of literacy concepts that they could apply successfully in their own home setting. When parents were trained appropriately, even low SES parents discovered and used inexpensive materials and unique methods to pass on these literacy concepts to their children.
7. Low SES parents' educational aspirations for their children were just as sincere, as dedicated, and as high as those parents of a medium or high SES. The low educational levels of these parents frequently were a stimulus to higher aspirations for themselves and their children if given the opportunity and the encouragement to achieve.

8. Providing linguistically and culturally relevant material was a means to secure full parent participation and cooperation. Linguistically different parents were pleased to learn that literacy efforts in their native language provided a variety of print strategies that were equally useful to their child's reading readiness. Bilingual parents needed competent reassurance that bilingualism was an asset that provided a cognitively enriched experiential background that might lead to their child's superior academic performance.
9. The study showed that low SES fathers are interested in their children but that work schedules often prevented them from participating in school activities. When workshops were arranged at convenient times, fathers made every effort to attend and were as receptive and enthusiastic as mothers regarding the literacy concepts presented.
10. A final conclusion of the study was that parent training in and application of literacy concepts at home strengthened the parent/child relationship. Parents became more patient, understanding, and aware of their children. They enjoyed them and developed a positive appreciation of their intellectual skills. The children became more involved in directing their own literacy development and

as a result of their educational preoccupations, they unconsciously eliminated negative behavior patterns.

Recommendations

Some recommendations emanating from this study for parent training follow:

1. Because the retelling category of the Book Handling Test was so familiar to parents and required an investment of time and attention, methods to encourage its incorporation into family reading activities should be found. One suggestion is to teach parents how to formulate appropriate verbal probes that will elicit the desired child response. When parents can move from "Show me" to "What" types of questions and are aware of the importance of this activity, the child's comprehension and the quality of the retelling itself will improve.
2. The terminology and retelling categories of the Book Handling Test do not enjoy the educational, media, and parental support that directionality and letter knowledge do. These categories are unfamiliar but not inimical to parents. Teaching parents about the importance of these categories to the child's book handling knowledge can serve as the focal point of a specific training session.

3. Parents need to understand how the reading process works and how their child accesses the available cues, grapho-phonics, syntactics, semantics and graphics (size, color, shape, etc.). Parents' knowledge of how the child uses these systems will assist the parent in planning home literacy activities and in developing a noncritical and accepting attitude towards the child's initial efforts to participate in an adult activity.
4. It is recommended that schools provide training so that parents become comfortable and confident in the school environment. Parents will familiarize themselves with the school setting, policies and procedures, and school personnel will be able to provide activities which are better suited to the community from which the child comes. One school person could be employed to plan and coordinate the parent training workshops so that the content would be professionally monitored.
5. The kindergarten and primary teachers need to become aware of the importance of supportive home and school environments for literacy. Encouragement could be provided to teachers through inservice programs and special workshop demonstrations that focus not only on literacy concepts, but on the importance of the parental role in academics and literacy readiness.

6. Parent training program presenters must address the special problems faced by low SES parents. Work schedules, language and ethnic differences, transportation problems, and especially child care are critical components of successful parent workshops and must be included in the programming.
7. Inclusion of workshop materials in the languages represented in the parent population would increase the level of parent participation and raise the total effectiveness of the workshop. Competent simultaneous translation of workshop presentations and discussion is strongly recommended for linguistically and culturally different parents.
8. The parents and children involved in this study had applied and not been accepted in the university Head Start Program. These families had a need that was not met by Head Start, but that was addressed in a limited manner by the workshops. It is recommended that the workshop format be taken up and properly funded by universities, community centers, or service organizations so that these needs can be met before the child goes to school.

The goal of the child, the parent, and the teacher is the same-- for the child to become a self-confident, independent reader. The child has the interest and enthusiasm to become a good reader; the

teacher has the professional expertise to help the child do so.

Parent training will help each parent participate in both the child's and the teacher's worlds so that an optimum home-school experiential match is created and sustained.

References

- Clark, M.M. (1976). Young fluent readers. London: Heinemann Educational books.
- Durkin, D. (1966). Children who read early. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Goodman, Y. & Altwerger, B. (1981). Print awareness in pre-school children: A working paper. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona, Program in language and literacy, College of Education (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 210 629).
- Holdaway, P. (1979). Foundations of literacy. New York, NY: Ashton Scholastic.
- Lujan, M.E. & Wooden, S.L. (1985). An exploration of environmental correlates of early childhood literacy. Las Cruces, NM: New Mexico State University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 258 696.)
- Teale, W.H. (1978). Positive environments for learning to read: What studies of early readers tell us. Language arts, 55, 922-929.